

Dear Friends,

A few days after [WatchTheMed](#) of October in the Mediterranean have shown once again that the consequences of an increased militarisation will only be the opposite of what we are told: more control will bring more deaths and pain.

We ask you to please disseminate the following statement to all people and networks which you think might be interested in this project. We also hope you will visit the revamped website and will give us feedback so as to make WTM an increasingly effective instrument to defend migrants' rights at sea. WTM is still in its beginnings and it needs wider support and participation on various levels. In the section [how to contribute](#) we have listed up several ideas of how we think WTM could participate in the wider movement demanding an end to the impunity for the increasing number of deaths at sea. With your help, we hope it will become a strong and useful tool within migration-related networks in the Mediterranean area.

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WatchTheMed

A counter-surveillance network to stop deaths and violations of migrants' rights at sea 5th of December 2013

While the EU launches Eurosur – the European Border Surveillance System – to further militarize its maritime borders, members of civil society launch WatchTheMed ([watchthemmed.net](#)) – a “counter-Eurosur” to document and denounce migrants’ deaths and violations of their rights in the Mediterranean.

3rd of October 2013. A boat carrying more than 500 people sinks less than 1km from the coast of Lampedusa. At least 366 people die, only 155 people are rescued.(1)

The response given by the EU to the public outcry caused by this tragic event is, once again, appalling. Instead of questioning the very migration policies which in the past twenty years have produced more than 14.000 deaths at the maritime borders of Europe(2), the EU makes yet another call to increase militarisation and border control. North African states are urged to crack down on migrants leaving their shores. Frontex, the European border agency – recently denounced for tolerating the frequent use of push-backs in the Aegean Sea(3) – is called upon to extend its operations to the whole Mediterranean. A new surveillance tool is deployed: Eurosur.

As a “system of systems” linking up all border-control authorities’ surveillance means, Eurosur is essentially an information exchange platform intended to provide the most precise “situational awareness” so that border guards can “detect, identify, track and intercept” irregular migrants, thus preventing them from entering EU territory undetected and, so it is said, allowing to save their lives. But how can more surveillance help save lives when it is the denial of legal access to EU territory and the militarisation of borders that force migrants to resort to clandestine and dangerous means of crossing in the first place? How can we accept the idea that more surveillance will offer a solution when the 3rd of October shipwreck occurred after the boat passed through the many layers of surveillance surrounding Lampedusa – making these the most controlled waters in the Mediterranean?(4)

11th of October 2013. A boat carrying more than 400 people sinks after it is shot by a Libyan vessel. Despite Italy and Malta being warned of the imminent distress of the passengers, rescue is delayed and patrol vessels arrive 1h after the boat sinks. More than 200 people die, only 212 people are saved.(5)

This case reveals the real face of surveillance and the effects of the militarization of the Mediterranean. On the one hand, this incident reveals the violence that migrants are subjected to as a result of the EU's pressure on North African states to block all migrants departing from their coasts. Over the last 10 years the EU and members states have provided military equipment to Libya including several patrol boats, despite the full knowledge of the systematic violations of migrants' rights perpetrated by the Libyan authorities. On the other hand, this case demonstrates that the knowledge of the migrants' distress which Eurosur promises to enhance is not sufficient to avoid this tragedy. As the investigation to which WatchTheMed has contributed has shown, the delay in the rescue is less an accident than the product of the reluctance of EU states to accept migrants on their territory, and the ensuing attempt to evade the responsibility to operate rescue. As a result, several vessels – including those of the Italian navy and coast guard – remained in vicinity but did not intervene until it was too late.

5th of December. Today, the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council will meet in Brussels and discuss further measures to combat "illegal migration" and avoid the deaths of migrants at sea. Eurosur was officially launched three days ago, after being in operation already since several months. While it is claimed that Eurosur will help save lives, the conditions of the deaths of over 600 migrants in the two shipwrecks described above reveal this as a fallacy for all to see. The European public should no longer be blinded by the humanitarian varnish painted over policies of closure and militarisation.

Migrants' rights organisations choose this day to launch their counter-Eurosur.

While EU states and border agencies are handed a new tool that will help them detect acts of clandestine mobility, civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean refuses to leave the militarisation of borders, deaths and violations of migrants rights in the darkness. To exercise a critical right to look at the EU's maritime borders, migrants' rights organisations, activists and researchers are launching an online mapping platform called WatchTheMed (WTM).

This tool allows these actors to monitor the activities of border controllers and map with precision the violations of migrants' rights at sea in the attempt to determine which authorities and actors at sea have responsibility for them. By interviewing survivors as well as using some of the very same technologies used by EUROSUR – vessel tracking technologies, satellite imagery, georeferenced positions from satellite phones – and spatialising the data that emerges from these sources, WTM is able to ask some of the following questions: in which Search and Rescue (SAR) zone was a vessel in distress and which state was responsible to operate rescue? Which vessels were in vicinity? If it was rescued, were the passengers brought to a territory in which they could apply for international protection or were they pushed back?

WTM then operates as an online and participative maritime control room, albeit with the opposite aims of border controllers: it seeks to enable critical actors to pressure authorities to respect migrants' rights and denounce their (in)actions when they violate them. Though WTM, we aim to bring the deaths of migrants at sea to an end and promote another vision of the Mediterranean. Instead of the deadly policies of closure of borders, openness and solidarity must shape the future of the Mediterranean area. It needs bridges instead of walls for a new African-European relationship through which the sea and beyond it Europe may become a place of freedom, security and equal rights for all.

Militarisation and surveillance are the problem, not the solution!

Border controllers, as long as you will be controlling the Mediterranean, we will be watching you!

Afrique-Europe-Interact, Boats 4 People, Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht & Migration, Welcome to Europe

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[1] <http://watchthemmed.net/reports/view/31>

[2] See: <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it>

[3] See the recent report by ProAsyl:

http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/I_EU_Fluechtlingspolitik/pushed_back_web_01.pdf

[4] The 3rd of October 2013 shipwreck is not the first one to occur very close to Lampedusa island. In September 2012, a Tunisian boat disappeared near the island of Lampione and may have cost the lives of more than 70 people. See:

<http://watchthemmed.net/index.php/reports/view/24> Lampedusa is covered by several coastal radars, between 10 and 20 patrol boats of the Coast Guard and Customs Police as well as maritime surveillance aircrafts are all deployed on and around the island, and Frontex partly finances and coordinates these means.

[5] <http://www.watchthemmed.net/reports/view/32>